CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method of manufacturing an item of build-to-order equipment having at least one hardware component bearing a unique identifier ("component ID") in software readable form, comprising:

    generating a digital identifier ("system trackcode") which defines the hardware and software configuration of the item;

    storing the system trackcode in association with the component ID in a non-specific external storage medium such that the component ID can be used as a key to retrieve the associated system trackcode; and

    at least at one stage of manufacture reading the component ID from the said at least one component and using it to retrieve the associated system trackcode from the external storage medium.

2. The method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

    storing the retrieved system trackcode in software readable form in a hardware component of the item.

3. The method as claimed in claim 2, wherein the hardware component in which the retrieved system trackcode is stored is the same hardware component as that bearing the component ID.

4. The method as claimed in claim 2, further comprising:

    reading the stored system trackcode from the hardware component during at least one subsequent stage of manufacture.

10

5.   The method as claimed in claim 2, further comprising:

generating at least at one stage of manufacture a further identifier ("hardware signature") uniquely related to a particular set of hardware components then incorporated in the item; and

storing the hardware signature in association with the system trackcode in the non-specific external storage medium.

6.   The method as claimed in claim 5, further comprising:

generating at least at one further stage of manufacture a current hardware signature; and

comparing the current hardware signature with the previously stored hardware signature to detect any change in hardware components between the two manufacturing stages.

7.   The method as claimed in claim 2, wherein the item of build-to-order equipment is a PC system unit.

8.   The method as claimed in claim 7, wherein the hardware component bearing a unique identifier is the PC system unit's motherboard.

9.   A method of building an information handling system (IHS) to conform to a custom order comprising:

deriving a system trackcode from a custom order;

scanning a hardware component to derive a component identifier;

associating the system trackcode with the component identifier in a database;

powering up the IHS after building the IHS;

retrieving the component identifier and the system trackcode by means of manufacturing software;

writing the system trackcode to a CMOS in the IHS; and

the manufacturing software thereafter reading the system trackcode
from the IHS.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising:

generating a unique identifier (HW SIG) associated with the trackcode.

11. The method of claim 10, further comprising:

retrieving the trackcode from the database; and

generating a current (HW SIG) to the database.

12. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

during subsequent power ups, retrieving the trackcode and the current
(HW SIG).

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:

retrieving the unique identifier (HW SIG) from the database using the
trackcode; and

comparing the unique identifier (HW SIG) against the current (HW
SIG).

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

in the event of a mismatch between both of the (HW SIG's), halting
manufacturing of the IHS.